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**REPORT OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON
RURAL JOURNALISM IN FOREIGN AID**

**to the
Agency for International Development
Department of State
Washington, D. C.**

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REPORT OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON RURAL JOURNALISM IN FOREIGN AID

The Advisory Committee on Rural Journalism in Foreign Aid recommends that the Agency for International Development staff and fund a program designed to promote rural journalism in developing nations. Because there is ample experience upon which to base the planning for such a program, there will be no need for a pilot project.

In what President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania called "the terrible ascent to modernization," the media of mass communication have a vital role to play. In many developing nations, however, newspapers circulate only in a few large cities. And radio, while receiving substantial assistance from central governments and helping to develop rational feelings of community, does little to involve most citizens in the projects designed to bring improvements to their own communities.

Over the years UNESCO and some industrialized nations have provided conventional journalism training at the college level for some students from developing countries, but trainees return home and work on capital city newspapers, radio stations, or in government information services. No case is known where any of them filtered outside the capital to start publications in other cities or in the villages.

The importance of the newspaper in developing countries is amply attested by experts:

E. Lloyd Sommerland, UNESCO, Paris: It is the focus of local activities . . . It is the tool of education . . . It brings development information as well as news, which helps improve agriculture, health, living conditions, and civic consciousness.

Literacy expert, Dr. Cyril O. Houle: It advances the economy; it enlarges the horizon of its readers; it spreads the ideas of government leaders and takes the voice of the people back to them; and . . . it helps weave the essential fabric of knowledge, trust, understanding, and inspiration which is at the heart of nationhood.

Dr. Wilbur Schramm, Director, Institute for Communications Research, Stanford: [It] is one of the great movers of national development. It serves the literate elite. It serves the new literate and gives him reason to learn to read better. It furnishes much of the public affairs information without which public participation in government would be at a very low level.

The kind of program the Advisory Committee is recommending is not sophisticated. We are talking about training local persons (school teachers and public health aides, for example) to gather and write the news of their communities, to add materials supplied by their governments, to collect small ads from the shops to defray costs, to type all this on stencils and run off the stencils on hand-powered mimeograph machines, and to distribute these simple newspapers in their immediate areas. The training period need not be extensive, and even providing typewriters, mimeograph machines, and basic supplies will involve very small sums of money. But the benefit—over a period of years—should be extensive.

We cite the vital role community newspapers, our old "country weeklies," played in modernizing our own farm culture in the first half of this century. Any USDA agricultural extension expert will testify to the absolutely crucial part that the weekly editors played in moving our farm people from a poverty-ridden subsistence agriculture to a modern agribusiness economy. We know one extension agent who says the problems of working among rural people in Georgia back in 1931 and upland Nigeria in 1971 were and are more alike than different.

The fact that few if any of these new rural newspapers will become self-sustaining enterprises for their editor/entrepreneurs should not be considered a deterrent. The teacher, for example, will continue to teach; the public health aide will continue his vital work. Few publishers in our own colonial and early national periods made much, if any, money from the operation of the papers. They were job printers, book sellers, postmasters, commission agents, etc., and the publishers of newspapers on the side—although invariably they preferred to be known in their communities as newspaper editors or publishers.

In even the most backward areas, wherever there has been rudimentary literacy training, there is an acute need for materials to read. Governments have expressed their interest in self-help educational support materials that will not be a drain on their budgets. The rural mimeograph newspaper is precisely what is needed because even in these backward areas the papers can be produced inexpensively, and just a little advertising will make them self-supporting.

What about freedom of the press? Most developing countries have strong, one-party governments whose leaders know very well the power of the press. They exercise complete political control of the existing media in their countries and do not tolerate much freedom of expression. But there is little need to worry about a free press where there is no press at all. It is first necessary to establish newspapers and assist the development of literacy before such concepts as freedom of the press can be nurtured.

To get a program under way an office of at least two technicians must be provided in the Agency for International Development, or in the technical assistance institute that is scheduled to take its place. Because journalism must be looked upon as a development tool that has a relevance for all regional and technical bureaus (education, agriculture, cooperatives, etc.), the office should be placed under a central direction that will allow it to function across all bureaus.

In its first year the program should plan and hold two training seminars in Africa, two in Latin America, two in India/Pakistan, and one in Southeast Asia. The seminars would be designed to provide practical, working, on-the-job training in starting community newspapers for about thirty participants each. Such seminars could be held for the nationals of just one country or, where language allows, for participants from several countries.

There will be no point in holding the seminars unless we are also to provide the equipment necessary to begin publication. Each successful participant in a seminar should be provided with a sturdy standard typewriter and a simple mimeograph machine. A part of the training should include care and basic maintenance of the equipment.

In the first year or two, as past experience has shown, follow-up training and refresher work will be important for the new publishers (who will also be the reporters, editors, business and printing staffs of their papers). Techniques for follow-up should include exchange of papers and distribution of a newsletter among members of the same seminar; correspondence critiques; visits to ailing publications; and perhaps even refresher seminars.

The Washington office should see to the immediate preparation of a basic, how-to-do-it rural journalism textbook. It could follow the general lines of the UNESCO booklet, "Rural Mimeograph Newspapers," although it should have large type, many illustrations, and be more simply written. It should be multilithed on durable paper, with the first copies available in the languages of the first year's seminars.

The program should be planned on a five-year basis. On a yearly basis of budgeting, a worldwide program can be conducted at a cost of a fraction of a percent of any yearly foreign assistance appropriation. Except for the central control in Washington, the program can be conducted on a contract basis.

Members of the Advisory Committee hope that the Peace Corps will encourage its Volunteers to mimeograph local news items and help show the way to the development of low-cost, self-help newspapers. Volunteers thus will also be helping to provide the local and town-to-town communications which are essential for community development.

While the role of the Peace Corps in foreign assistance is quite different from that of AID, the Peace Corps can make a strong contribution to modernization through the establishment of rural mimeograph newspapers by Volunteers who have had the self-help newspaper concept made a part of their initial training. Indeed, we hope that in every agency of government which deals with developing countries, top level personnel will be made aware of the need and importance of self-help rural news publications.

Because of the long delay already experienced, it is imperative that the program of rural journalism assistance be begun as soon as possible. It should have an active office in the present Agency for International Development and in any future restructured foreign assistance organization. If the Agency for International Development responds within a reasonable time to the recommendations of this study, the first training actions can be taken before the end of calendar 1971.

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